DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 085 24 EA 002 691

AUTHOR Barber, William H.; Pock, Leo P.
TITLE Interpersonal Dynamics and Organizational Change in Religious Communities.
INSTITUTION Western Behavioral Sciences Inst., La Jolla, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
BUREAU NO BR-8-0897
PUB DATE Jan 69
GRANT OEG-0-8-980897-4691
NOTE 22p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.20
DESCRIPTORS Bureaucracy, *Catholics, Communication (Thought Transfer), Feedback, Group Dynamics, Group Norms, Institutional Role, *Interpersonal Competence, *Organizations (Groups), Problem Solving, *Religious Cultural Groups, Self Actualization

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the organizational structure of religious communities and its effect on interpersonal relations. Religious communities tend to be organized structurally according to the traditional bureaucratic model of (1) relatively rigid structure; (2) carefully defined functional specialization; (3) direction and control implemented through a formal authority hierarchy; (4) fixed patterns of rights, duties, and procedures; and (5) relative impersonality in interpersonal relationships. Criteria for describing interpersonal competence are listed as: (1) perceiving the situation accurately, (2) solving problems so that they remain solved, and (3) continuing to be able to work with the other person(s). The structure of the formal organization, along with the existing values and norms governing interpersonal relations in religious communities, combine to maintain a decreased level of interpersonal functioning. (Author/MF)

ED035085

BR 8-0897
PA 24
OE/BR

WBSI

INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

William H. Barber and Leo P. Rock

WESTERN BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE
1150 Silverado
La Jolla, California 92037

January, 1969

EA 002 691

ED035085

INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

William H. Barber and Leo P. Rock

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

William H. Barber is Associate Professor of Psychology, Gonzaga University, currently on leave as USOE postdoctoral research fellow at Western Behavioral Sciences Institute and Center for Studies of the Person. Leo P. Rock is Assistant Professor of Psychology, Santa Clara University.

The purpose of this paper is to apply Argyris' theoretical statements concerning interpersonal competence acquisition and organizational effectiveness to one kind of organization currently undergoing rapid change—religious communities such as those in the Catholic church.

Even the most casual observer of Church and religious affairs is aware of the atmosphere of ferment and change—often agonized—that has increasingly dominated the scene since Vatican II. What is happening in most religious communities is a case in point. Precious little, if anything, is exempt from earnest questioning and experimentation. Values held sacred and untouchable, in some cases for literally centuries, are suddenly the object of searching reappraisals. Not only the modes of living religious life but the very concept of religious life is grist for the mill. It is scarcely surprising, then, that the processes of change have been attended by so much confusion, fear, and suspicion.

Perhaps no area of change has been as controversial and emotionally charged as the area of interpersonal relations in religious life. What place do personal relations have in the life of a religious community? What kinds of relationships are appropriate? How do they affect community objectives? On these and similar questions virtually no one stands neutral. The issue is one which reaches deeply into persons and values.

In what follows, we intend to summarize one set of criteria for assessing interpersonal competence, and then relate these criteria to the interpersonal world of religious life.

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE

Argyris (1968) suggests a way of looking at these questions that may help to understand the idiosyncratic characteristics of religious communities. Defining interpersonal competence as "the ability to cope effectively with interpersonal relationships," he suggests three criteria for effective coping: perceiving the situation accurately, solving problems in such a way that they remain solved, and continuing to be able to work with the other person(s). The essential criterion of interpersonal competence is transfer of learning, viz., behavior and attitudes are changed "in such a way that observable changes can be found in solving interpersonal problems outside the learning situations."

This kind of learning depends on four elements which, in effect, are conditions under which interpersonal competence can be acquired. To acquire interpersonal competence, individuals must learn to:

(1) communicate with each other in a manner that generates minimally distorted information;

(2) give and receive feedback that is directly validatable and minimally evaluative;

(3) perform these skills in such a way that self-acceptance and trust among individuals tend to increase; and

(4) create effective groups in which problem solving may occur.

Minimally distorted information. Problem solving is competent to the extent one has access to accurate information; one must know what the problem is and what alternatives for solution there are before he can hope to deal with the problem competently. The ability to solve interpersonal problems competently requires first of all access to accurate information. And yet, as both evidence and experience make clear, it is precisely in the interpersonal arena that accurate information is most difficult to come by. The sources of distortion are many and complex.

The probability of giving and receiving minimally distorted information increases in direct proportion to increases in the level of self-awareness and self-acceptance, of acceptance and trust of others, of confidence in self and others. For instance, the more one is aware and accepting of his tendency to maneuver others into intimate relationships with himself, the more probable it is that he will tend to discuss this (give information) and listen (receive information) with minimal distortion. Thus, whatever contributes to increase in self-awareness and self-acceptance, acceptance and trust of others, and confidence in self and others will also increase the probability of minimally distorted information; and conversely, whatever tends to decrease these factors tends to decrease the probability of minimally distorted information.

Interpersonal competence is transactional or situational and not merely an intrapersonal ability. One's chances of behaving in an

interpersonally competent manner depend not only on his willingness and ability to do so, but also on the willingness and ability of others to behave in this manner. One's personal skills are necessary but not sufficient. In terms of access to accurate information, this means that one of the conditions essential to the acquisition of interpersonal competence is the giving and receiving of helpful information (helpful when it tends to be distortion-free). Feedback has to do with this giving and receiving of information.

Feedback directly validatable, minimally evaluative.

(a) Directly Validatable. If the accuracy of information must be personally established and not merely assumed (and this is nearly always the case in the interpersonal arena where the information-distorting factors are so complex and varied), then the question of validation or verification arises.

It is important here to distinguish between two different types of information. The first type is the information that can be verified directly by self and others because it refers to directly observable behavior. For example, "You are blushing and there is a tremor in your voice." "You interrupted Joe the last three times he started to say something." The second type of information is that which can be verified only by reference to categories that are inferred. Examples of this type of information are: "You are projecting" (reference to an inferred formal theoretical framework); "He is a nice person" (reference

to inferred personal values); "You are kidding yourself" (reference to inferred inner state of others).

Where information depends on inferred categories for its verification, the process of verifying it requires an individual's dependence either on the inferred conceptual framework or on the authority of the one dispensing the information. This dependence, however, tends to decrease the very factors which contribute to minimally distorted information. For example, verification, in this case, requires not self-acceptance and self-awareness, but awareness and acceptance of either a theoretical framework or another's authority (omniscience). Again, such verification requires that trust and confidence not be placed in self but in either a theoretical framework (whose validity is ambiguous) or in the omniscience of an authority. Information, therefore, that is to be minimally distorted should be as far as possible directly verifiable.

(b) Minimally Evaluative Feedback. Another characteristic of helpful (minimally distorted) information is that it be minimally evaluative of the recipient's behavior. One reason for this is that such information reduces the probability of making the receiver defensive, thus engendering conditions under which accurate listening will be increased. (One implication of this is the conclusion that the communication of all information is not necessarily valuable. Rather, only that openness which helps the receiver of feedback to learn is valuable.)

A second reason why minimally evaluative information is helpful is the fact that this kind of information locates the responsibility for evaluation where it belongs—with the individual trying to learn about himself. This does not mean that all evaluation is harmful: on the contrary, evaluation is necessary and essential to any learning process. What it does mean is that the most effective learning occurs under those conditions in which an individual takes responsibility for evaluating his own behavior and then asks for confirmation or disconfirmation from others. Even negative evaluation of one's behavior, confirmed by others, can lead to growth and inner confidence in one's capacity to assess his behavior correctly.

Self-acceptance and trust among individuals. From what has already been said it is clear that self-acceptance and trust among individuals are factors that minimize information distortion. Thus a learning situation is effective to the extent that it generates a climate of self-acceptance and trust among individuals.

Effective groups. Interpersonal competence, as was seen above, is a situational ability; it depends not only on one's own skills but on those of others. Moreover, the very nature of personality is such that it needs others for completeness. These are two of the reasons why the acquisition of interpersonal competence requires effective groups. Membership in an effective group, then, is essential for the learning process which leads to interpersonal competence.

Argyris lists four major dimensions of group effectiveness (1968):

(1) The members focus on defining group goals that satisfy the needs and utilize the abilities of the individual members. Adequate time is spent to make certain that the goals represent a challenge and that the members are internally committed to the achievement of the goals.

(2) Attention is paid, whenever necessary, to the group processes. For example, are the members' contributions additive? Do the members attend to the history of the group in order to learn from its successes and failures, from its internal conflicts, from its problem solving? Are the members owning up to their ideas and feelings? Are they open to new ideas and feelings? Are they experimenting and taking risks?

(3) Norms are generated that reward the individuality of each member that show respect and concern for the members' ideas and feelings, and that facilitate and maintain a sense of trust.

(4) Leadership is shared so that each member is leading the group when his skills are the most pertinent to the achievement of the group goals (p. 160-161).

Granted the existence of an effective group, how may it be used as a medium for learning? First, the more strongly <u>all</u> members feel a sense of belonging to the same group, the more effectively will the group become

a medium for learning. Secondly, the more attractive the group is to its members, the greater influence the group can exert on its members. And finally, the more sharing there is by the members of the group of their perceptions of the need for change, the more likely it is that the group will mediate that change.

In summary these are one set of criteria for describing interpersonal competence. How successfully are these criteria realized in religious communities? If membership in an effective group is a condition for interpersonal competence, what can be said of the characteristics of the group to which members of religious communities belong? How do these characteristics affect interpersonal and organizational effectiveness?

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES: FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS

Religious communities tend to be organized structurally according to the traditional bureaucratic model; that is, relatively rigid structure, carefully-defined functional specialization, direction and control implemented through a formal authority hierachy, fixed patterns of rights, duties and procedures, and relative impersonality of interpersonal relationships.

Although religious communities are becoming increasingly aware that this bureaucratic model is no longer adequate to meet demands placed upon them from within or without, they have maintained these characteristics to a relatively high degree. This being the case, it is

possible to deduce certain hypotheses about the effects of this pattern on the overall effectiveness of a community and the interpersonal competence of its members.

One way of looking at the effects of this type of organization is to relate Argyris' organizational model (1962) to the circumstances of religious communities. Major elements include (1) values governing interpersonal relationships, (2) consequent ways of behaving and (3) the effects of both of these on the community.

INSTITUTIONAL PURPOSE: THE SOURCE OF VALUES

In the broadest sense the institutional objectives of most religious communities can be said to encompass religious witness, apostolic work and personal sanctification. Given these goals, there is a variety of values and modes of behavior possible in the implementation of these goals. Observing present practices, however, leads one to conclude that certain specific values and modes of behaving have, in fact, become the preferred means of implementing these objectives. There seem to be several specific values that dominate the interpersonal world of the religious community.

Operationally, the interpersonal values of the religious community can be inferred from the responses to three questions:

(1) What is the proper place of interpersonal relations in a religious community?

(2) How does a member of a religious community become interpersonally effective?

(3) What kinds of behavior enable communities and individuals to achieve and maintain interpersonal effectiveness?

These three questions are in logical sequence. However, while one can state a priori that certain values exist and are operative in religious communities, a more reliable method is to describe the behavior observed, and from this behavior infer the values that are operative. The third question above has to do with directly observable behavior; from this behavior the responses to the two preceding questions can be inferred. For this reason the questions will be considered in reverse sequence.

PREFERRED STYLES OF BEHAVIOR

What are the kinds of social interaction preferred by religious communities for achieving and maintaining interpersonal effectiveness?

Observation of behavior of members of religious communities suggests that on becoming a member of a religious community one is expected to take on a personal role based on an implicit conceptual model of the "ideal religious"—as conceived by the particular community and to some degree set forth in its constitution. This role comes "ready made," specified by a set of prescribed norms concerning dress, manners, language, ceremonial behavior and other extermals. This pre-tailored role has the advantages of enabling members to predict and control their own and others' behavior and of obviating the need for experimenting with different roles; thus, major personal risks are

unnecessary. Clear-cut external norms for evaluating one's own and others' behavior are thereby provided.

Once one assumes such a personal role, interpersonal role expectations follow from it and influence the characteristics of relationships that are appropriate and inappropriate. Appropriate relationships are those governed by moderation. Moderation is maintained by a prudent caution and is expressed in terms of polite regard, courtesy and a certain measure of interpersonal distance between persons. Conversely, that which is immoderate is inappropriate. A lack of moderation is manifested, for example, in excessive sharing of personal feelings which could lead to intimacy. Sharing negative feelings especially is seen as inappropriate and disruptive.

These personal and interpersonal role expectations when viewed collectively provide a foundation for "community spirit," which in turn sets its own expectations. These expectations include fraternal charity (which makes it possible for members to "live together") and loyalty to the community (which requires personal ratification of the above role expectations).

INTERPERSONAL VALUES

This statement of personal, interpersonal and community role expectations placed on individual members identifies the values that are implicit.

(1) It implies that interpersonal relations are effective to the extent that the individual has a capability of controlling and directing himself and his interaction with others and that he has available to him appropriate supports, rewards and sanctions that enable him to make rational choices about interpersonal relationships.

(2) Furthermore, these values in turn presuppose a second order value: That an effective life style is best achieved by rationally ordering one's life in a way that prevents the interfering influences of personal feelings and needs.

(3) In its simplest and most basic form this rational style rests on the relationship of means to ends. What conduces to the end is effective, desirable and valued. Therefore, in the last analysis, the ultimate criterion for judging desirable, valuable and appropriate interpersonal relations is to be found in the relationship of these interpersonal relations to community objectives. The ultimate test of the appropriateness of interpersonal relations for members of religious communities is quite simply the extent to which these relationships further community objectives.

In summary, the questions that precipitated this discussion are reiterated and responded to:

(1) What is the proper place of interpersonal relations in a religious community? Appropriate interpersonal relationships

are those related to community objectives, (e.g., religious witness, apostolic work, personal santification).

(2) How does a member of a religious community become interpersonally effective? Interpersonal effectiveness is based on a rational, logical ordering of one's life. The interfering influences of personal feelings and needs are avoided.

(3) What types of behavior enable communities and individuals to achieve and maintain the rational and logical ordering that is interpersonal effectiveness? In order to be interpersonally effective the way to behave is to be able to direct and control one's own and others' behavior and to use rewards and sanctions that place a high premium on rationality.

Figure 1 charts these values and their effects.

A. COMMUNITY VALUES - INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

1. APPROPRIATE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS ARE THOSE RELATED TO COMMUNITY OBJECTIVES (E.G. RELIGIOUS WITNESS, APOSTOLIC WORKS, PERSONAL SANCTIFICATION).

2 INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS IS BASED ON A RATIONAL, LOGICAL ORDERING OF ONE'S LIFE. THE INTERFERRING INFLUENCES OF PERSONAL FEELINGS AND NEEDS ARE AVOIDED.

3 IN ORDER TO BE INTERPERSONALLY EFFECTIVE THE WAY TO BEHAVE IS TO BE DIRECTIVE AND CONTROLLING AND TO USE REWARDS AND PENALTIES THAT PLACE A HIGH PREMIUM ON RATIONALITY.

→

B. CONSEQUENT WAYS OF BEHAVING

DECREASING:

1 NONEVALUATIVE FEEDBACK;

2 OWNING AND ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO OWN THEIR IDEAS, FEELINGS AND VALUES;

3 OPENNESS TO NEW IDEAS, FEELINGS AND VALUES;

4 EXPERIMENTATION AND RISK-TAKING WITH NEW BEHAVIOR.

→

DECREASED INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE

→

C. EFFECTS ON THE COMMUNITY

LOW RISKS NECESSARY

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

INTERPERSONAL CONFORMITY

INTERPERSONAL MISTRUST

HIGH PREDICTABILITY AND CONTROL

WITHDRAWAL, ISOLATION AND COMMUNITY RIGIDITY

INCREASED INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY DEFENSIVENESS

DECREASE IN EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

→

DECREASED EFFECTIVENESS:

OBJECTIVES OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS AND THE COMMUNITY ARE LESS FULLY REALIZED.

(LEADS TO REINFORCING EXISTING VALUES)

FIGURE 1. A MODEL OF COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

If an organization is formally organized along bureaucratic lines and the values we have described exist, one can predict that the following kinds of interrelated interpersonal behavior will tend to decrease (Schein and Bennis, 1967):

(1) receiving and giving nonevaluative feedback;

(2) owning and permitting others to own their ideas, feelings and values;

(3) openness to new ideas, feelings and values;

(4) experimentation and risk-takingwith new ideas, feelings and values.

This state of affairs is likely to result in 1) members being unaware of their interpersonal impact upon others, and 2) members being unable to solve interpersonal problems in such a way that they will tend not to reoccur.

In religious communities members have formally dedicated their lives to living and working together to achieve institutional goals. Perhaps no other organization in our society enlists such "full time commitment." Obviously tremendous human resources exist when large numbers of intelligent persons commit their total time and energy to altruistic purposes. Yet the bureaucratic organization and the existing value system concerning interpersonal relations have a number of predictable effects on the functioning of the community—and these effects frustrate the achievement of the same altruistic purposes. These are summarized in Part C of Figure 1.

Certain norms develop. If I cannot receive information about my impact on others and give information about their impact on me I am likely not to trust my own reactions since I cannot confirm or disconfirm them. Thus, it is safer for me to limit my interaction to relatively "low-risk" encounters. I will reveal myself in areas where I can be in accord with stated community values and norms. This will be especially true with my superiors and subordinates, those with whom I consider my own adequacy to be an issue.

I am aware that I am highly dependent upon my superiors because it's not safe for me to take high interpersonal risks with persons in authority; also because my superiors have the power to control my destiny in the community. As I look around and observe myself and my conferees "playing it safe" and "saying the right thing" especially around superiors—keeping to issues for which there exist clear community values—it seems to me we are a relatively homogeneous group. There exists a good degree of conformity.

One way we've learned to "adapt" is to look for cues from superiors as to what is desirable behavior. We've also learned how to exert pressure on superiors to define boundaries and alternatives clearly. This enables us to function within safe limits; however, it also seems to reinforce dependency and conformity.

It's not surprising to me in this situation that we are not very creative in the decisions that get made. Innovative, "far out" ideas don't occur very often and when they do we don't seem to have the capability of exploring and testing them. Perhaps it's because creativity doesn't flourish in a climate of mistrust, dependence and conformity.

Thus, interpersonal mistrust, conformity, and dependence become the consequences of decreased interpersonal competence for the community. One reinforces another and together they maintain or decrease further the existing level of interpersonal competence.

These kinds of behavior also tend to strengthen the existing values toward interpersonal relationships. The research on perception and learning

indicates that when trust is low and non-authentic behavior high, the tendency is to focus on and reinforce present values. Thus, the cycle continues.

IMPLICATIONS

In summary, we have described a set of behavioral criteria for the trait interpersonal competence and we have stated that interpersonally competent behavior is frequently not manifested in religious communities. The structure of the formal organization along with the existing values and norms governing interpersonal relations combine to maintain a decreased level of interpersonal functioning. As a result, religious organizations with these characteristics are less likely to solve problems and make decisions as efficiently and effectively as they might.

The paradox is that the goals that cause members to join the community and to which they commit their lives are not being met; either for individual persons or for the community itself. Something like the following seems to be happening: Specific modes of behavior are required of members; the raison d'être is found in the community objectives, but the results of this behavior is to frustrate community objectives. In a word, the very behavior required by membership is the antithesis of the kind of behavior needed to reach community goals.

What does this analysis suggest for religious communities in view of the current emphasis on "renewal"?

(1) The model describes a self-regulating and self-perpetuating system. That is, as long as individuals operate

within the value system the resulting behavior has predictable effects on the community which tend to reinforce traditional interpersonal values; thus the cycle continues.

(2) There are at least two somewhat indirect mechanisms for bringing about change in the system. One is through external pressures on the community (e.g., Vatican II), but these to be influential must be forceful enough to bring about renegotiation of norms and values governing interpersonal behavior. A second indirect mechanism is through "seeding" the system with individuals who will behave in accordance with different values and who have the influence to make their behavior legitimate for others to imitate. The latter strategy seems to be more prevalent today.

(3) Attempts to change the consequences of decreased interpersonal competence (mistrust, conformity, dependence and quality of problem-solving and decision-making, etc) by superimposed policy decisions made by superiors are not likely to succeed. For stable change to occur it must be possible to influence the values. The most leverage for change is through increasing the interpersonal competence of members of the community, assuming the underlying values are open for negotiation.

(4) Organizational development efforts in other contexts indicate that increasing interpersonal competence alone is not

sufficient. Other organizational factors such as authority patterns and expectations, reward and penalty systems, policy-making responsibility, etc., are all based on the same set of values. Thus, they must also be modified to support the changes occurring in interpersonal competence. And organizational development experience in other contexts (e.g., Schmuck, 1968) suggests that working on both sets of issues (interpersonal and organizational) simultaneously has the highest payoff for stable change.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C. Interpersonal competence and organizational effectiveness. Chap. 2 cf. Interpersonal competence and organizational effectiveness. Homewood, Ill.: Irwin-Dorsey, 1962.

Argyris, C. Conditions for competence acquisition and therapy. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 1968, 4 (2), 147-177.

Schein, E. H., & Bennis, W. G. (Eds.) Personal and organizational change through group methods: The laboratory approach. New York: Wiley, 1965.

Schmuck, R. A. Helping teachers improve classroom group processes. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 1968, 4, 401-435.